

With Edged Tools

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN
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One Generation to Another," Etc.

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Then she rose from her seat, and, standing in the middle of the room, faced him with a sudden gleam in her eyes.

"I do not see what it has to do with me," she said; "I do not know anything about Maurice's business arrangements and very little about his business friends."

"Then let me tell you, Jocelyn—well, then, Miss Gordon, if you prefer it—that you will know more about one of his business friends before you have finished with him. I've got Maurice more or less in my power now and it rests with you."

At this moment a shadow darkened the floor of the veranda and an instant later Jack Meredith walked quietly in by the window.

"Enter, young man," he said dramatically, "by window—center."

"I am sorry," he went on in a different tone to Jocelyn, "to come in this unceremonious way, but the servant told me that you were on the veranda with Durnovo, and—"

He turned toward the half breed, pausing.

"And Durnovo is the man I want," weighing each word.

Durnovo's right hand was in his jacket pocket. Seeing Meredith's proffered salutation, he slowly withdrew it and shook hands.

The flash of hatred was still in his eyes when Jack Meredith turned upon him with aggravating courtesy. The pleasant, half cynical glance wandered from Durnovo's dark face very deliberately down to his jacket pocket, where the stock of a revolver was imperfectly concealed.

"We were getting anxious about you," he explained, "seeing that you did not come back. Of course, we knew that you were capable of taking care of yourself."

He was still looking innocently at the telltale jacket pocket, and Durnovo, following the direction of his glance, hastily thrust his hand into it.

"But one can never tell with a treacherous climate like this what a day may bring forth. However, I am glad to find you looking so very fit."

Victor Durnovo gave an awkward little laugh, extremely conscious of the factory clothes.

"Oh, yes; I'm all right," he said. "I was going to start this evening."

The girl stood behind them, with a flush slowly fading from her face.

There are some women who become suddenly beautiful, not by the glory of a beautiful thought, not by the exaltation of a lofty virtue, but by the mere practical human flush. Jack Meredith, when he took his eyes from Durnovo's, glancing at Jocelyn, suddenly became aware of the presence of a beautiful woman.

The crisis was past, and, if Jack knew it, so also did Jocelyn. She knew that the imperturbable gentleness of the Englishman had conveyed to the more passionate West Indian the simple, downright fact that in a lady's drawing room there was to be no raised voice, no itching fingers, no flash of fiery eyes.

"Yes," he said; "that will suit me splendidly. We will travel together."

He turned to Jocelyn.

"I hear your brother is away?"

"Yes, for a few days. He has gone up the coast."

Then there was a silence. They both paused, helping each other as if by prearrangement, and Victor Durnovo suddenly felt that he must go. He rose and picked up the whip which he had dropped on the matting. There was no help for it—the united wills of these two people were too strong for him.

Jack Meredith passed out of the veranda with him, murmuring something about giving him a leg up. While they were walking round the house Victor Durnovo made one of those hideous mistakes which one remembers all through life with a sudden rush of warm shame and self contempt. The very thing that was uppermost in his

"You need not be afraid to come back now," Jack Meredith went on, with a strange refinement of cruelty. And that was all he ever said about it.

"Will it be convenient for you to meet me on the beach at 4 o'clock this afternoon?" he asked when Durnovo was in the saddle.

"All right; 4 o'clock."

He turned and deliberately went back to the bungalow.

There are some friendships where the intercourse is only the seed which absence duly germinates. Jocelyn Gordon and Jack had parted as acquaintances; they met as friends. There is no explaining these things, for there is no gauging the depths of the human mind. There is no getting down to the little bond that lies at the bottom of the well—the bond of sympathy. There is no knowing what it is that prompts us to say, "This man or this woman of all the millions shall be my friend."

"I am sorry," he said, "that he should have had a chance of causing you uneasiness again."

Jocelyn remembered that all her life. She remembered still, and Africa has slipped away from her existence forever. It is one of the mental photographs of her memory, standing out clear and strong amid a host of minor recollections.

"I do not believe," she said, "that you know the risks you are running into."

Even in the short time that Maurice and I have been here we have learned to treat the climate of western Africa with a proper respect. We have known so many people who have succumbed."

"Yes, but I do not mean to do that. In a way Durnovo's—a what shall we call it?—lack of nerve is a great safeguard. He will not run into any danger."

"No, but he might run you into it."

"Not a second time, Miss Gordon. Not if we know it. Oscar mentioned a desire to wring Durnovo's neck. I am afraid he will do it one of these days."

"The mistake that most people make," the girl went on more lightly, "is a want of care. You cannot be too careful, you know, in Africa."

"I am careful; I have reason to be."

She was looking at him steadily, her blue eyes searching his.

"Yes," he said slowly, and there were a thousand questions in the word. "It would be very foolish for me to be otherwise," he said. "I am engaged to be married, and I came out here to make the where-withal. This expedition is an expedition to seek the where-withal."

"Yes," she said, "and therefore you must be more careful than any one else, because, you see, your life is something which does not belong to you, but with which you are trusted. I mean if there is anything dangerous to be done let some one else do it. What is she like? What is her name?"

"Her name is Millicent—Millicent Chyne."

"And—what is she like?"

He leaned back and, interlocking his fingers, stretched his arms out with the palms of his hands outward, a habit of his when asked a question needing consideration.

"She is of medium height. Her hair is brown. Her worst enemy admits, I believe, that she is pretty. Of course I am convinced of it."

"Of course," replied Jocelyn steadily. "That is as it should be. And I have no doubt that you and her worst enemy are both quite right."

CHAPTER XIII.

RUMOR met Maurice Gordon almost at the outset of his journey northward. "Smallpox is raging on the Ogowe river," they told him. "The English expedition is stricken down with it. The three leaders are dead."

Maurice Gordon had not lived four years on the west African coast in vain. He took this for what it was worth. But if he had acquired skepticism he had lost his nerve. He put about and sailed back to Loango.

"I wonder," he muttered as he walked up from the beach to his office that same afternoon—"I wonder if Durnovo is among them."

And he was conscious of a ray of hope in his mind. He was a kind hearted man in his way, this Maurice Gordon of Loango, but he could not disguise from himself the simple fact that the death of Victor Durnovo would be a distinct convenience and a most desirable relief.

Thinking these thoughts, Maurice Gordon arrived at the factory and went straight to his own office, where he found the object of them, Victor Durnovo, sitting in consumption of the office sherry.

Gordon saw at once that the rumor was true. There was a hunted, unwholesome look in Durnovo's eyes. He looked shaken and failed to convey a suggestion of personal dignity.

"Hello!" exclaimed the proprietor of the decanter. "You look a bit chippy. I've heard you've got smallpox up at Msala."

"So have I. I've just heard it from Meredith."

"Just heard it! Is Meredith down here too?"

"Yes, and the fool wants to go back tonight. I have to meet him on the beach at 4 o'clock."

Maurice Gordon sat down, poured out for himself a glass of sherry and drank it thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Durnovo," he said emphatically, "I have my doubts about Meredith being a fool."

"Indeed!" with a derisive laugh.

Maurice Gordon looked over his shoulder to see that the door was shut. "You'll have to be very careful," he said. "The least slip might let it all out. Meredith has a quiet way of looking

at one which disquiets me. He might find out."

"Not he," replied Durnovo confidently, "especially if we succeed, and we shall succeed; we shall!"

Maurice Gordon made a little movement of the shoulders as indicating a certain uneasiness, but he said nothing.

There was a pause of considerable duration, at the end of which Durnovo produced a paper from his pocket and threw it down.

"That's good business," he said.

"Two thousand tusks," murmured Maurice Gordon. "Yes, that's good. Through Akmed, I suppose?"

"Yes. We can outdo these Arabs at their own trade."

An evil smile lighted up Durnovo's sallow face. When he smiled his drooping, curtain-like mustache projected in a way that made keen observers of the human face wonder what his mouth was like.

Gordon, who had been handling the paper with the tips of his fingers as if it were something unclean, threw it down on the table again.

"Ye-es," he said slowly, "but it does not seem to dirty black hands as it does white. They know no better."

"Lord!" ejaculated Durnovo. "Don't let us begin the old arguments all over again. I thought we settled that the trade was there. We couldn't prevent it, and therefore the best thing is to make hay while the sun shines and then clear out of the country."

"But suppose Meredith finds out?" reiterated Maurice Gordon, with the lamentable hesitation that precedes loss.

"If Meredith finds out it will be the worse for him."

A certain concentration of tone aroused Maurice Gordon's attention, and he glanced uneasily at his companion.

"No one knows what goes on in the heart of Africa," said Durnovo darkly. "But we will not trouble about that. Meredith won't find out."

"Where is he now?"

"With your sister at the bungalow. A lady's man—that is what he is."

On hearing that Jack was at the bungalow with Jocelyn, Maurice Gordon glanced at the clock and wondered how he could get away from his present visitor. The atmosphere of Jack Meredith's presence was preferable to that diffused by Victor Durnovo. There was a feeling of personal safety and dignity in the very sound of his voice which set a weak and easily led man upon his feet.

But Victor Durnovo had something to say to Gordon which circumstances had brought to a crisis.

"Look here," he said, leaning forward and throwing away the cigarette he had been smoking, "this simlacine scheme is going to be the biggest thing that has ever been run on this coast."

"Yes," said Gordon, with the indifference that comes from nonparticipation.

"And I'm the only business man in it," significantly.

Gordon nodded his head, awaiting further developments.

"Which means that I could work another man into it. I might find out that we could not get on without him."

The black eyes seemed to probe the good natured, sensual face of Maurice Gordon, so keen, so searching was their glance.

"And I would be willing to do it, to make that man's fortune, provided that he was my brother-in-law."

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Gordon, setting down the glass that was half raised to his lips.

"I mean that I want to marry Jocelyn."

And the modern school of realistic, mawkishly foul novelists, who hold



"Besides," he said, "I may succeed with out any of that—eh?"

that love exorcism all would have taken delight in the passionate rendering of the girl's name.

"Want to marry Jocelyn, do you?" answered Maurice, with a derisive little laugh. On the first impulse of the moment he gave no thought to himself or his own interests and spoke with undisguised contempt. He might have been speaking to a beggar on the roadside.

Durnovo's eyes flashed dangerously and his tobacco stained teeth clinched for a moment over his lower lip.

"That is my desire and intention."

"Look here, Durnovo," exclaimed Gordon, "don't be a fool! Can't you see that it is quite out of the question?"

"No," he said, "I can't see that it is out of the question. On the contrary,

it seems only natural that she should marry the man who is her brother's partner in many a little speculation."

Maurice Gordon, sitting there staring hopelessly into the half breed's face, saw it all. He went back in a flash of recollection to many passing details which had been unnoted at the time; details which now fitted into each other like links of a chain, and that chain was around him. He leaped forward in a momentary opening of the future, and saw himself ruined, disgraced, held up to the execration of the whole civilized world. He was utterly in this man's power, bound hand and foot. He could not say him no, and least of all could he say no to this de-

mand, which had roused all the latent ebullience, gentlemanliness, brotherly love that was in him. Maurice Gordon knew that Victor Durnovo possessed knowledge which Jocelyn would consider cheap at the price of her person.

"I don't think," said Durnovo, who seemed to be following Gordon's thoughts, "that the idea will be so repellent to your sister as you seem to think."

And a sudden ray of hope shot athwart the future into which his listener was staring. It might be so. One can never tell with women.

"I don't want you to do anything now," he went on more gently. It was wonderful how well he knew Maurice Gordon. The suggested delay appealed to one side of his nature, the softened tone to another. "There is time enough. When I come back I will speak of it again. Your sister is very fond of you, and—I think I have one or two arguments to put forward which she would recognize as uncommonly strong. I would not bring forward those arguments except as a last resource. I would first point out the advantages. A fourth share in the simlacine scheme would make you a rich man—above suspicion—Independent of the gossip of the market place."

Maurice Gordon winced visibly, and his eyes wandered as if he were about to give way to panic.

"You could retire and go home to England—to a cooler climate. This country might get too hot for your constitution. See?"

Durnovo came back into the center of the room and stood by the writing table. His attitude was that of a man holding a whip over a cowering dog.

He took up his hat and riding whip with a satisfied little laugh, as if the dog had cringingly done his bidding.

"Besides," he said, with a certain defiance of manner, "I may succeed without any of that—eh?"

"Yes," Gordon was obliged to admit, with a gulp, as if he were swallowing his pride. And he knew that in saying the word he was degrading his sister—throwing her at this man's feet as the price of his own honor.

With a half contemptuous nod, Victor Durnovo turned and went away to keep his appointment with Meredith.

Guy Oscar was sitting on the natural terrace in front of Durnovo's house at Msala, and Marie attended to his simple wants with that patient dignity which suggested the recollection of better times and appealed strongly to the manhood of her fellow servant Joseph and her whilom master.

"I hear the sound of paddles," she said.

"My ears are not so sharp as yours," said Oscar.

He listened, and after a moment heard the regular plug-plug of the paddles stealing over the waters of the still tropic river, covering a wonderful distance.

"Yes," he said, "I hear. Mr. Meredith said he would be back tonight."

She gave a strange little low laugh—almost the laugh of a happy woman.

The two boats came on to the sloping shore with a grating sound, and by the light of the waving lanterns Oscar saw Durnovo and Jack land from the same boat.

The three men walked up to the house together. Marie was at the door and bowed her head gravely in answer to Jack's salutation. Durnovo nodded curtly and said nothing.

In the sitting room, by the light of the paraffin lamp, the two Englishmen exchanged a long questioning glance, quite different from the quick interrogation of a woman's eyes. There was a smile on Jack Meredith's face.

"All ready to start tomorrow?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Oscar. To be Continued

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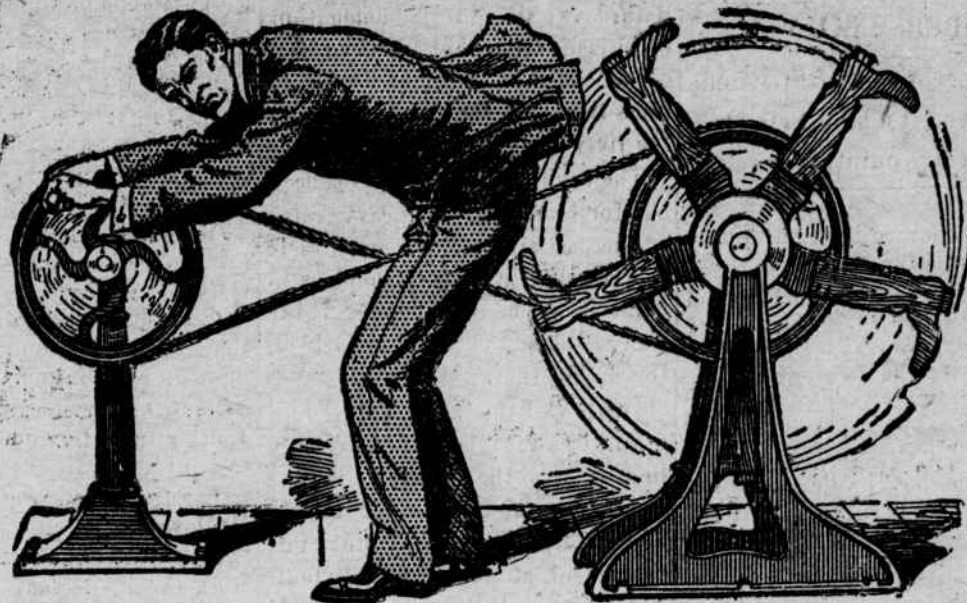
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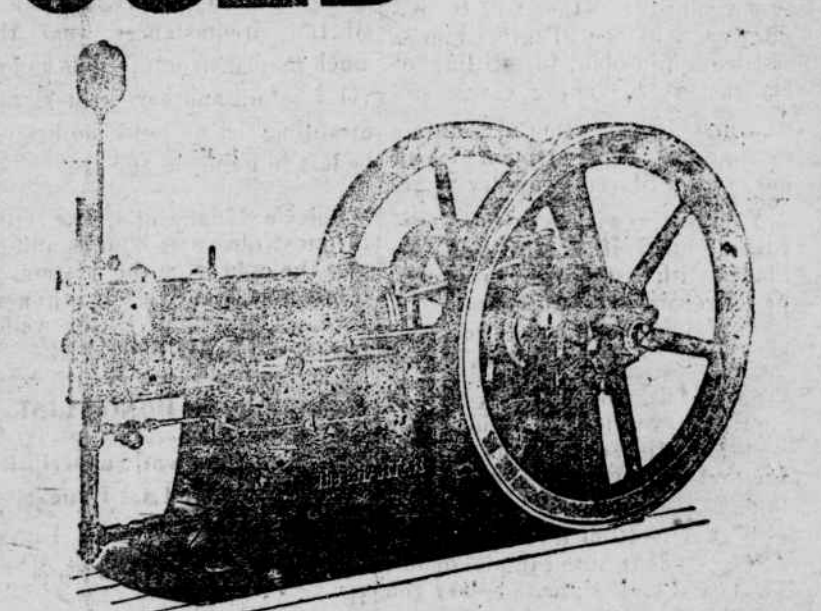
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"Enter, young man," he said dramatically, "by window—center."

mind to be avoided suddenly bubbled to his lips, almost, it would seem, in defiance of his own will.

"What about the small—the 'smallpox'?" he asked.

"We have got it under," replied Jack quietly. "We had a very bad time for three days, but we got all the cases isolated and prevented it from spreading. Of course we could do little or nothing to save them; they died."

Durnovo had the air of a whipped dog. His mind was a blank. He simply had nothing to say. The humiliation of utter self contempt was his.